

## Beyond the Panama Treaties

There have always been two battles between proponents and opponents of the Panama Canal treaties. One is rational—to determine whether the treaties as negotiated provide a basis for turning the canal over to the Panamanians while still guaranteeing its safety and rights of rapid American passage in an emergency. The other battle is deeply subjective. As a recent pamphlet by the American Security Council put it, there lingers among Americans a "desperate feeling that giving away the canal would be wrong in some way more important than they know how to say."

The first of these battles is, at last, about to reach the Senate floor. The chances for approval of the treaties, once doubtful, now seem high. The change is due to the careful way the Senate's leaders have approached the issue and the skill and frankness with which Panama's leader, General Torrijos, has dealt with about 40 Senators who have visited him in recent months. Senators Byrd and Baker, the majority and minority leaders, have joined in urging ratification provided the treaties can be augmented by the language of last October's statement by President Carter and General Torrijos. That statement affirmed the right of the United States to defend the canal beyond the year 2000 and the right of American warships to go to the head of the line for emergency passage through the canal. It also forswore any "right of intervention of the United States in the internal affairs of Panama."

These provisions are, in fact, implicit in the treaties

signed last autumn, but it is undoubtedly useful to make them explicit. General Torrijos has been open-minded about the method—amendments to the treaty, a separate protocol, an attached "understanding," or yet something else. And even while the treaties were being written, he was cool to a provision, inserted at American request, that Senator Baker now seems to want deleted. It would oblige the United States to build any new sea-level canal in Panama and oblige Panama to allow only the United States to build one. Senator Baker must argue out that issue with the Administration, not with the Panamanians.

So the Senate battle seems destined to end with a victory for the nation's larger interests in Latin America, including recognition of the sovereign equality of all hemisphere nations and those of American interests in the canal that are truly vital.

The second battle—arising from the gut feelings of Americans about a growing tension in their relations with much of the globe's population—will continue no matter what the Senate does with these treaties. "The primary issue is the right of the United States to exist," says the American Security Council pamphlet, for "surrendering" the canal would be a step toward renouncing "the United States's right to her values and her life." Washington will have to address the deep fears of change evoked in this debate by demonstrating the benefits of working with, and not against, the aspirations of other peoples.